



# WORKING LANDS ALLIANCE

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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## Testimony Opposing HB 6842 Sec. 1 and 2 Government Administration and Elections Submitted by: Lisa Bassani, Working Lands Alliance March 2, 2015

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in **opposition of Sections 1 and 2 of HB 6842, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Governor Concerning General Government.**

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland, and includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, CT Forest & Park Association, CT Farmland Trust, End Hunger CT!, CT Farm Bureau, CT Land Conservation Council, among many others. Our efforts focus on increasing the pace of farmland preservation and advancing agricultural viability in Connecticut.

Our coalition strongly opposes Sections 1 and 2 of this bill, which propose to transfer the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to the Joint Committee on Legislative Management and effectively eliminate the Executive Director position and staff funding for the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Section 2 also strips the Council of its authority to require submission by state agencies of construction plans at all stages of development for their review when building upon previously undeveloped land.

Since 1971, CEQ has been charged with assessing the condition of the environment in Connecticut and reporting those findings annually to the Governor. In addition, the Council plays a vital role in recommending actions to Governor for improving our environmental programs and investigating citizens' complaints and alleged violations of our environmental laws.

On a small budget, the Council serves a critical function as an independent watchdog of the state's environmental efforts. To function effectively, the Council must remain independent of the legislative branch of government and be able to provide critique on environmental matters and bring forward recommendations that may not be supported by leadership at the time. The transfer to Legislative Management, as proposed by the Governor, would put the Council's independence in question and limit its ability to report honestly and openly about our progress on key environmental indicators.

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Finally, our coalition strongly opposes the elimination of funding for the Council staff, who leverage hundreds of hours of volunteer time to fulfill its responsibilities. The proposal to strip the Council of its staff is short-sighted, particularly in light of the many environmental challenges we expect to face as a state and a region over the coming decades. Our efforts to protect our farmland and conservation lands, our water, and our many other natural resources will only grow in importance, and, in turn, so will the role of CEQ in evaluating our progress and finding areas we can improve. We urge this Committee to oppose the Governor's proposal regarding CEQ, and allow the Council to retain the administrative structure and staffing needed to do the job as mandated by statute.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony.